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AUTHOR Valdivieso, Rafael
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ABSTRACT

The major conclusion of a conference on Hispanic-Americans and education was that partnerships among businesses, school, and the Hispanic community can make a big difference in improving the educational preparation of young Hispanics for success in a fast-changing economy. It was also recognized that the future for Hispanics in the United States is an increasingly vital part of the national interest, and that educational institutions cannot meet the challenge alone, but need collaborative support from the business and Hispanic communities. After an introductory section, the report gives short summaries of the issues discussed: the problems of a changing economy, pervasive problems in education, leaks in the educational pipeline, school-to-work transition, and the corporate stake in the Hispanic future. A discussion on the place of Hispanic culture and the Spanish language in American society, with emphasis on concerns and fears about bilingual education, is also summarized. Three composite approaches to addressing identified needs that emerged from the discussions are described: the local school and community approach, the systemic approach, and the human resource development approach. And finally, recommendations for action by corporations and the business community and by the Hispanic leadership and community are offered. A list of conference participants is provided. (CMG)

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Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies

717 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10022
212 759-1053

Cable—Aspeninst New York
Telex—710 581 5508
(ASPENINST NYK)

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HISPANIC-AMERICANS AND EDUCATION

Business-School-Community Partnerships to Prepare Hispanic Youth for a More Demanding Economy

Report
by
Rafael Valdivieso
of an
Aspen Institute Conference

Sponsoring Chairmen
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Robert M. McIntyre, Southern California Gas Company
Gerald D. Foster, Pacific Telephone
Ignacio E. Lozano, Jr., La Opinion

Moderator
Michael Rice
Senior Fellow
Aspen Institute

Aspen Institute at Baca Grande
Crestone, Colorado
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Partnerships among businesses, schools, and the Hispanic community throughout the United States can make a big difference in improving the educational preparation of young Hispanics for their success in the fast-changing economy. This was the leading conclusion of the participants in a recent Aspen Institute conference, who also recognized that:

1. The future for Hispanics in the U.S. is no longer a parochial interest but rather an increasingly vital part of the national interest; and

2. Educational institutions cannot meet the challenge alone: They need the collaborative support from the business and Hispanic communities that can help to prepare Hispanic youth for productive work in an economy that is demanding ever more skills and knowledge from its labor force.

Individuals from various parts of the country gathered at the Aspen Institute's center at Baca Grande, Colorado, July 5-9, 1983, to examine the condition of Hispanic education in the United States and to consider the steps that businesses and community organizations could take to improve both (a) the educational opportunities offered Hispanics and (b) the level of Hispanic educational achievement.

This report describes those who met, the problems and issues they discussed, and their various recommendations. The draft of this report was circulated to all participants: Most accepted it as written; some suggested minor changes that have been incorporated here to the extent possible; and one wished to have it stated that not every participant would entirely agree with the way the problems have been defined or with the solutions offered.

PARTICIPANTS

The members of the conference group--half of them Hispanic--included two former U.S. Commissioners of Education, a publisher, educators, several corporate executives, researchers, journalists, the mayor of a southwestern city, and the presidents of a state board of education, a foundation, and a college.

The conference was co-chaired by George F. Moody, President and Chief Operating Officer, Security Pacific National Bank, Gerald Foster, Vice President, Pacific Telephone; and Ignacio E. Lozano, Publisher, La Opinion. Michael Rice, Aspen Institute Senior Fellow, organized the conference with the advice and assistance of Rafael Valdivieso of the Hispanic Policy Development Project. The conference was made possible by grants from the Atlantic Richfield Foundation, the Security Pacific National Bank, the Spanish International Communications Corporation, Southern California Gas Company, Pacific Telephone, and La Opinion.

ISSUES

Problems of a Changing Economy

The conference participants could cite many individual Hispanics with successful records in education and careers, but they felt that the future opportunities for other Hispanics--and for other Americans new to the workforce--may be dwindling. The newest Hispanic immigrants willingly work under unsatisfactory conditions, but the members of the second generation, though often inadequately educated, are not so willing to accept the same sort of work, nor do they find their relatively low skills in demand. The economy is relying more and more on high-skilled workers and automation to gain a productivity advantage in a highly competitive world. In a decade or two, American society could be rent, as one participant expressed it, by a "class chasm." That would be the chasm between the technologically literate and the technologically illiterate--between an elite of efficient producers and a mass of low-income consumers. Given such structural change, how to ensure equity and fairness will emerge all the more starkly as the most pressing social issue.

Pervasive Problems in Education

Many problems affecting Hispanics in schools and institutions of higher education were recognized to be widespread: (a) Too little is understood of the Hispanic cultural and historical contribution to American society; (b) Educators all too often take a pejorative view of Hispanics' cultural values; (c) Hispanics are underrepresented as educators and administrators; (d) Hispanics are typically left out of important decisions about the educational process; and (e) Hispanic students lack adequate testing and career guidance.

Leaks in the Educational Pipeline

Although recently Hispanic students in elementary schools have registered academic gains, the situation for many Hispanic students in secondary and post-secondary institutions remains dismal. A key indicator is the high attrition or dropout rate for Hispanics. In 1980, 15 percent of white, 21 percent of black, and 35 percent of Hispanic youth aged eighteen to nineteen were not enrolled in school and did not have high school diplomas. Hispanic students who remain in school often fall behind their classmates in academic achievement, and about one-fourth are two grades behind their age contemporaries.

While the pool of Hispanic high school graduates is proportionately smaller, the share to enter college is about the same (50%)

as for their white and black counterparts. One major study reports, however, that family and financial considerations contribute to a college dropout rate of 55 percent for Hispanic students as compared to 34 percent for white students. Because of poor preparation, lack of means, family responsibilities and constraints, including in many cases a desire to remain close to home, Hispanics tend to concentrate in two-year rather than four-year institutions. For this reason, the common difficulty of proceeding from a community college to a senior college affects Hispanic students disproportionately more than others. Only a fraction of Hispanic students, often still ill-prepared, continues beyond two-year to four-year institutions. This trend is made harder to overcome for Hispanic female students whose families do not encourage or support them in the quest for a college education.

These leaks in the educational pipeline mean that Hispanics are less likely than either whites or blacks to succeed in completing college, receiving degrees, or pursuing graduate and professional training.

School-to-Work Transition

Financial difficulties and the need for a job are the most evident reasons given by Hispanics for dropping out of high school or college. Conversely, limited or poor educational preparation is the most frequent reason given for the inability of many Hispanics to move up to better jobs. The mismatch between the low educational and skill levels of Hispanic youth and the high-skill requirements of available jobs results in structural unemployment or, at best, low-wage jobs for Hispanic adults. Discrimination and language difficulties also hamper employment opportunities for Hispanics.

Corporate Stake in the Hispanic Future

The development of well-informed citizens, cognizant consumers, and productive employees should be at the heart of corporate America's interest in Hispanics. Some corporations, including the ones represented at this seminar, have already sought and established partnerships and programs with specific schools and systems with the aim of direct benefit to Hispanic students. These corporations believe it is not enough simply to provide funds to schools and community organizations, but that a sincere commitment of corporate skills, resources and time is also needed. This is well illustrated by the two hundred companies that have adopted individual schools in Los Angeles. Each company works with a school in a unique way, depending on the mutuality of the school's needs and the corporation's resources. Yet, the fundamental responsibility of the corporate sec-

tor, as one Hispanic participant reminded the group, is "to take care of business or to make the economics of society work, which, in turn, will generate a sense of hope for all workers."

THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The place of Hispanic culture and the Spanish language in American society proved to be divisive issues for the participants. Many concerns--even fears--revolved around the use of bilingual education for Hispanics in public schools.

Concerns and Fears

Why do Hispanics seem to cling to their culture and to the Spanish language? Are Hispanics fearful of assimilating into the larger society? Why should Hispanics be treated differently from the immigrants of the past or other groups now? These and similar questions marked the candor of the conference group.

The apparent frustration of some corporate representatives in encountering less-than-proficient English speakers in occupational settings is coupled with the fear that the tolerance of bilingualism undermines English as the "glue" of American society. It was argued that the creation of a large--and growing--block of ethnically conscious persons who exercise their political strength and rely on a variety of bilingual services, including bilingual ballots, can only lead to societal fragmentation and conflict.

Central to these concerns is the fear that transitional bilingual education--the use of the home language in teaching general subject matter while students learn English--will produce limited-English-proficient adults who will not be able to succeed in society and will need to depend on the state for their welfare. Even if the goal of bilingual education is to produce English-speaking persons, some felt that the methods would have the opposite effect. Research on bilingual education, others argued, has not provided sufficient proof of its effectiveness, especially when measured against its extra costs. In this regard, English-language immersion programs --in which students are taught English as they learn their other subjects in English--were proposed as an alternative to bilingual education.

The Response

Some participants felt these concerns were "red herrings."

But others quickly objected, saying these concerns were real but misplaced. Despite what many may believe to be the cause of language problems in this country, neither the existence of large numbers of Hispanics with limited proficiency in English nor the large numbers of Hispanic dropouts can be attributed to bilingual education, it was explained. Bilingual type of education never has been, nor is it now, prevalent enough to account for these numbers. If anything, bilingual education has helped to retain some students in school, according to some studies.

The large numbers of dropouts and of persons with limited English proficiency can more soundly be attributed, some argued, to the low quality of general educational programs, to the relative lack of special language programs for both children and adults, and to the large, continuing flow of immigrants.

A more accurate picture of Hispanic communities in this country would be helpful in isolating problems and proposing solutions. Hispanic communities represent more or less bilingual and bicultural social contexts, reinforced by Spanish-language media, business and immigration. Residents enjoy varying degrees of Spanish-language proficiency for practical and cultural reasons but still, almost universally, acknowledge and accept the need to learn English in order to succeed in American society. Actually, recent research shows that Hispanics are acquiring English-language proficiency as rapidly as any language-minority group in the past. Their situation is really not so different from that of past immigrants and their ethnic communities--except, as an Hispanic educator explained, the U.S. economy can no longer absorb the very large numbers of school dropouts that were a common feature of earlier immigrant groups.

Nor is it the desire of Hispanics to become separatists from the larger society. In spite of the long and extensive history of discrimination experienced by Hispanics in the U.S., they have remained loyal Americans. Secretary Weinberger recently announced that more Hispanics have received the Congressional Medal of Honor than members of any other ethnic group in American history--37 since the Civil War and through the Vietnam engagement.

Other points were made about the teaching of, support for, and cost of bilingual education. The bilingual-education profession is developing and maturing although it is still being criticized for the inferior training and the uneven implementation that occurred during its early years.

Two recent studies by independent researchers show strong popular support for bilingual education. Eighty to ninety percent of the Hispanic parents surveyed by the National Opinion Research Center

in San Antonio and Los Angeles wanted bilingual education for their children. And a study conducted by a Columbia University research team revealed that 70 percent of the Hispanics surveyed in New York City and Los Angeles, and 63 percent of the non-Hispanics surveyed nation-wide, favor bilingual education programs in the nation's public schools for students who do not speak English. (One participant objected, however, saying he could cite evidence to the contrary.)

The start-up and maintenance costs for bilingual education are somewhat higher than for regular education, but other special language programs such as language immersion also cost more. In any case, these costs, according to one view, are outweighed by the potentially much greater costs society might otherwise have to bear in rehabilitating or supporting non-productive adults.

Finally, English language-immersion programs, English-as-a-Second-Language programs, and bilingual-education programs were all considered by some participants to be viable options in working with limited-English-proficient students. It was pointed out, however, that while immersion programs are successful with adults and teenagers, research findings from around the world indicate younger children who belong to dominated or low-status minorities do not do well in language-immersion programs. Children from supportive, middle-class homes, whose own language and culture are not threatened, are the ones who succeed most in immersion programs.

APPROACHES

Not surprisingly, the participants could not agree on any one way to address the identified needs. At least three composite approaches emerged from the discussions:

The local school and community approach concentrates on a school-by-school analysis for formulating and implementing local solutions. The stress is on the fostering of personal values such as pride, a sense of ownership, a sense of hope and the possible, and the accountability of both school personnel and students for the quality of their work.

The systemic approach presupposes that the solution of school problems does not lie in the schools themselves or even in business-school partnerships. Solutions require fundamental--radical--changes in American institutions and societal input. "Otherwise, we are just tinkering," it was expressed. The emphasis is on economic development and job creation, and not on "social engineering programs that deal with pathology and residual social programs."

The human resource development approach tries to avoid the

trap of focusing too broadly or too narrowly on the issues. "Yes, we need a school-by-school approach, but societal problems are so complex that this is not enough," argued one Hispanic participant. A broader approach aims to improve the human resource or "human capital" value of Hispanics and other Americans so they will be fully qualified for roles in today's economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During the final day of the conference, the participants--both Hispanic and non-Hispanic--contributed to a list of actions they would urge on the business community, as well as actions they would urge on the Hispanic community, to begin solving the problems they had discussed.

What Corporations and the Business Community Should Do

1. Provide support to train more and better Hispanic teachers.

2. Support the collection of useful and reliable data by which to measure progress and to judge the effectiveness of different programs.

3. Sponsor "future teachers clubs" and "Adopt-a-School" programs.

4. Encourage the trainers of teachers: support graduate students with stipends on the condition that they will teach for a stated minimum period following completion of their training.

5. Offer home-purchase loans to teachers so they will not have to leave the field in order to afford home ownership.

6. Encourage Hispanic employees to run for local school boards and other bodies concerned with public education.

7. Contribute "time and talent" in cooperation with Hispanics.

8. Get involved in human resource development plans targeted to Hispanics in key states.

9. In working with the Hispanic community, adopt the strategy of starting small, going where you are wanted, building on what you know, and setting objectives that are consistent with your interests as a profit-making enterprise.

What Corporations and the Business Community Should Do (cont.)

10. Offer part-time jobs to help students stay in school, and do so in a committed and systematic way.

11. Voice concerns about inadequately-trained potential employees: specify needed competencies, testify before legislative and policy bodies.

12. Support the "local school foundation" movement to involve smaller businesses in partnerships with education.

13. Associate with local professional organizations.

14. Address parental involvement.

15. Take the story of your partner efforts to the public: use advertising as well as general publicity.

16. Decide on area of focus--teachers, students, school systems, Hispanic organizations.

17. Establish intern programs for high school students.

18. Offer to match employees' contributions to public schools.

What the Hispanic Leadership and Community Should Do

1. State clearly the educational outcomes desired now and in the future.

2. Insist on quality from as well as for Hispanic students.

3. Do something about sexism among Hispanics, especially in professional areas.

4. Resist undermining interest in the humanities by an exclusive pursuit of high-tech prospects.

5. Assume the responsibilities of mentors to younger Hispanics.

6. Develop a plan for Hispanics: establish a set of expectations on which to act and monitor progress.

7. Join the broader leadership of the whole urban community, and then make room for those who can grow into leadership roles.

What the Hispanic Leadership and Community Should Do (cont.)

8. Take up the issue of stipends to students in order to allay the financial problems that lead many young Hispanics to leave school and search for work.

9. Emphasize positiveness and self-reliance.

10. Tap the Hispanic middle class for support.

11. Develop better cooperation among Hispanic groups.

12. Help in the general education of the public about the Hispanic situation.

13. Develop linkages between New York City and San Juan, and between U.S. and Mexican border schools, to help students who move back and forth.

14. Encourage small businesses to funnel support through the channel of community foundations.

15. Be more creative and open to new solutions.

16. Use Hispanic media to reach parents.

17. Continue to encourage math, engineering, education and business careers.

18. Collect information on existing conditions and programs: publish sourcebook.

19. Invest back into the community, especially through leadership development.

HISPANIC-AMERICANS AND EDUCATION

Aspen Institute at Baca Grande, Colorado, July 5-9, 1983

PARTICIPANTS

Edward Aguirre, Chairman, Board of Trustees, The National Hispanic University, Oakland

Carlos H. Arce, Executive Director, National Chicano Council on Higher Education, Austin

Tomas Arciniega, President, California State University, Bakersfield

Joaquin G. Avila, President and General Council, Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, San Francisco

Elizabeth W. Bartscherer, Special Assistant to the Chairman, Atlantic Richfield Company, Los Angeles

Blandina Cardenas-Ramirez, Director, Division of Training, Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio

Henry Cisneros, Mayor, San Antonio

Kenneth M. Cuthbertson, President, The James Irvine Foundation, San Francisco

Mercedes Lynn de Uriarte, Assistant Editor, Opinion Section, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles

Noel Epstein, Washington Post, Washington, DC

Anita Epstein, Director of Government Affairs, National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria

Bob Finnell, President, NACME, New York City

Gerald D. Foster, Vice President, Pacific Telephone, Los Angeles

C. Hugh Friedman, President, California State Board of Education, La Jolla

Anne E. Impellizzeri, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York City

William J. Johnston, Manager, Public Affairs, Southern California Gas Company, Los Angeles

Francis Keppel, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute, Cambridge

Ignacio E. Lozano, Jr., Publisher, La Opinion, Los Angeles

Arturo Madrid, Professor of Spanish, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

William M. Marcussen, Vice President, Public Relations, Atlantic Richfield Company, Los Angeles

Everett G. McDonough, Vice President, Community Economic Development, Security Pacific National Bank, Los Angeles

George F. Moody, President and Chief Operating Officer, Security Pacific National Bank, Los Angeles

Siobhan Oppenheimer-Nicolau, President, Hispanic Policy Development Project, New York City

Nathan Quinones, Executive Director, High School Division, New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn

Clark W. Reynolds, Professor of Economics, Food Research Institute, Stanford University, Stanford

Michael Rice, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute, New York City

Richard Santos, Professor of Economics, University of Texas, Austin

Leo Trujillo, Division Manager of Materiel and Subcontracts, Software and Information Systems Division, TRW, Inc., Redondo Beach

Edith W. Vaage, Principal, Tenth Street School, Los Angeles

Rafael Valdivieso, Senior Associate, Hispanic Policy Development Project, Washington, DC